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ABSTRACT

Community schools bring the full range of educational enrichment, health, and social services that all families need under the roof of the public school. For service providers and schools alike, it can be an effective and relatively inexpensive way to serve the community's families and children. This brochure has been developed for concerned and active parents who believe that their child's school can be and do more for their child, family, and community. It gives an introduction to the community school approach, explains its benefits for parents and their children, and offers some simple steps that can be taken to begin creating a new community school. Key distinguishing features of these schools include education being the first priority, extended hours and more learning opportunities, family involvement and support, onsite services, community support, and long-term partnerships between the school system, community agencies, and parents. Recent studies indicate that high-quality community school programs can improve academic achievement, attendance, and parental involvement, while creating a safer and friendlier school environment. The brochure concludes with an annotated list of community school resources. (RT)

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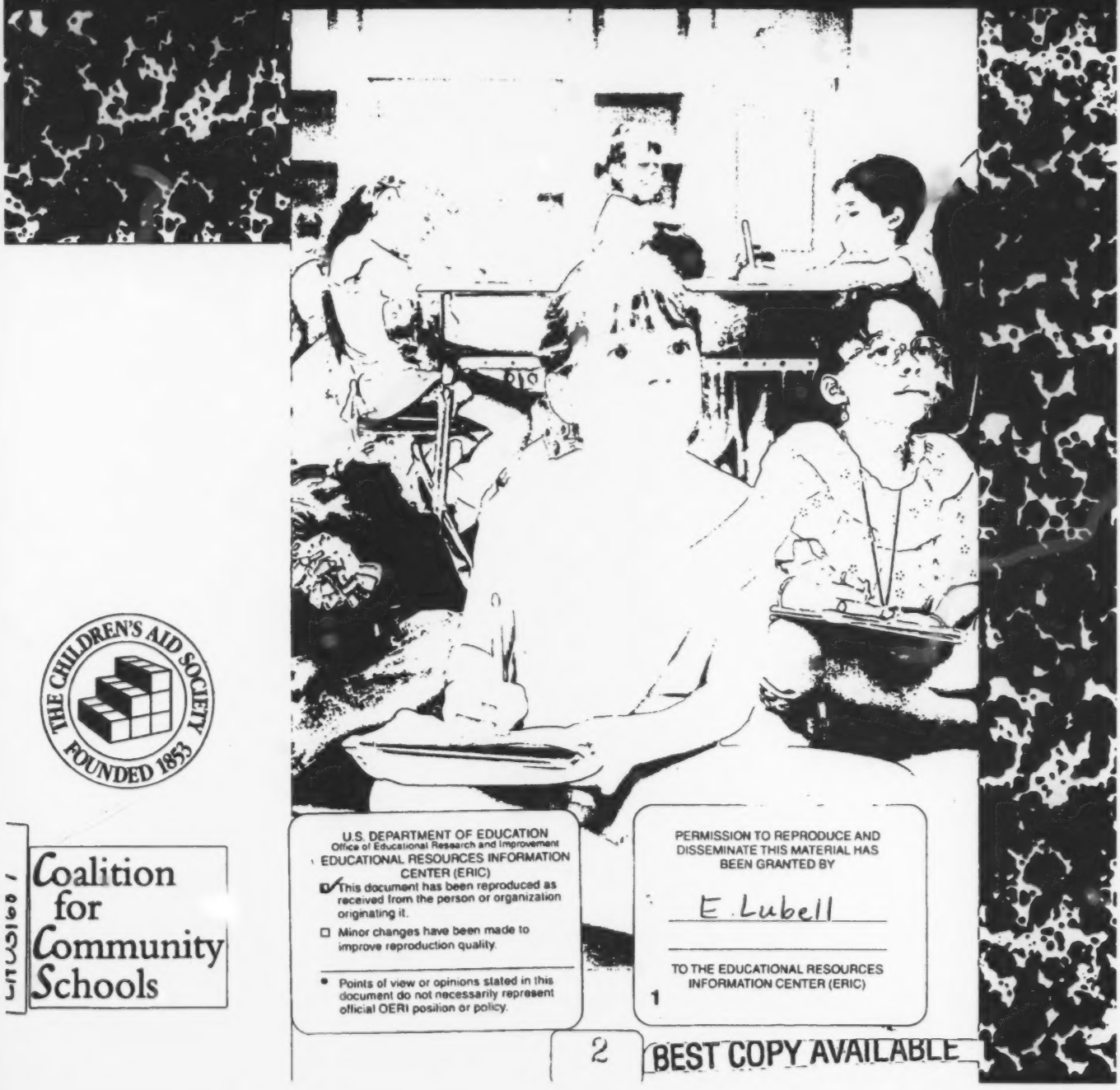
Building A Community School:

A Parents' Guide



THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY
FOUNDED 1853

Coalition for Community Schools

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Building a Community School: A Parents' Guide

Thanks for calling 1-877-LOVE-2-LEARN! You've seen or heard one of our public service advertisements for community schools for excellence, and have made a phone call that may change your attitude toward public education forever.

If you have ever felt that your child's public school can do more, be more, help your community more, then you may be very interested in what The Children's Aid Society has to say about community schools.

On the following pages you'll learn more about community schools, which are public schools that offer much more than conventional schools can in a 9-to-3 day. Traditionally, public schools have been structured to achieve academic goals, but increasingly schools are finding that for students to achieve these goals, some basic emotional, social and health needs must be addressed also. In fact, many educators have complained that, despite dwindling resources for the most basic educational programs, they have been forced to serve as surrogate families and social service agencies to their students – often at the expense of education.

In contrast, the community school brings the full range of educational enrichment, health and social services that all families need under the roof of the public school. For service providers and schools alike, it can be an effective and relatively inexpensive way to serve the community's families and children.

This transformation isn't easy and it takes a number of partners from the community to make it happen. But your efforts will result in a school that can help your child get the best education possible.

Do You Want a Better Public School?

In towns and cities across America, families, educators and community leaders are joining a growing movement to transform their traditional public schools into full-day, full-service "community schools."

Once described as "Schools of the Future," community schools are quickly becoming schools of today. They provide high quality education, while offering a wide variety of on-site services and activities that today's children need in order to learn, achieve and reach their full potential.

Support for Children and Families

A community school combines the best features of a traditional public school, a community center, and health clinic – with amazing benefits for children and families. Open early mornings, afternoons, evenings, weekends and summers, the

community school serves as a true center of community life – a place where your child attends classes, and can also receive medical and dental care, speak to a counselor about a problem and stay after school to build reading skills, play chess, work on a computer, take art and music lessons, get help with homework, practice basketball moves, even attend summer camp.

Parents and other community members also play active roles in the school. Parents are welcome and encouraged to get involved in their children's education, as well as to take adult education classes, get advice and support, learn how to help their children succeed in school, help teach, meet other parents and create their own programs, support groups and activities.

The Power of Partnerships

Of course, schools can't do all of these things on their own; they partner with parents, elected officials, school board members and community agencies already working in the area and agree to work together as long-term partners within the school. Parents are essential partners.

Community schools have been created with the belief that children need many different kinds of supports and opportunities to do their best, that schools are the most logical places to offer those supports and opportunities, and that good schools make healthy communities.

What You Can Do Now

This brochure has been developed for concerned, active parents like you who believe your child's school can be more and do more for your child, your family and the whole community. In these pages, we will give you an introduction to the community school approach, explain its benefits for you and your children, and offer some simple steps you can take to begin turning your school into a community school.

What's Different About a Community School?

Since each community school is designed locally by school officials, parents and community agencies, there isn't a single formula for a community school, but there are some key ingredients:

Education is First Priority

Education is always the first priority; all of the services and activities offered at the community school are designed to support children so that they can focus on learning.

Extended Hours and More Learning Opportunities

Instead of sitting dark after 3:00 p.m., community schools are bustling late into the day and all year round. Many open at 7:00 a.m. and stay open all afternoon and into the evening. They also offer weekend and summer programs with educational and recreational opportunities for children, families and the whole community.

Family Involvement and Support

Because children do best when their families are active in their education, community schools encourage parents and families to participate in their children's learning. At the same time parents can develop their own skills, among them how to support and monitor their children's education, as well as advocate for better schooling for all children in the community.

On-Site Services

Services vary according to local needs, but in many cases they include enriched after-school activities and family support services, medical and dental care, mental health counseling, Head Start or preschool programs, adult education courses, and summer activities. The different partners help to provide the different programs.

Community Support

By extending its hours and by expanding its relationships with local resource organizations, the community school can become a neighborhood hub serving the entire community. It might offer adult education courses that strengthen skills and contribute to greater employment and earnings; provide medical and dental facilities open to community residents; host community-wide events that provide forums for neighbors to meet, support and celebrate with one another; and provide paid jobs and volunteer opportunities for community residents. The school might also become the community recreation center, offering residents a chance to play soccer, basketball, and other sports, hold music or cultural festivals, and other popular events.

Long-term Partnership

The process of changing your school is not a one-year project, but a long-term partnership comprising the school system, community agencies and parents, all of whom are committed to improving the lives of the children, their families, and the larger community.

How Do Community Schools Help Children?

Recent studies indicate that high quality community school programs can improve academic achievement, attendance and parental involvement, while creating a safer, friendlier school for everyone. Also:

- On-site services help children address emotional, social and physical needs so they have fewer obstacles to learning.
- Children are involved in constructive learning activities throughout the afternoon, which according to several recent studies can lead to better school performance. Over 90 percent of American parents say they want some type of organized after-school activity for their children.
- Many of the important people in a child's life – parents, teachers, principals, health professionals, youth workers – are in daily contact and can work together to resolve problems and find answers.
- Community schools offer parents a more active role and voice in their children's education, as well as a place where parents can improve their own lives. And research shows that children perform better in school when their parents are involved in and supportive of their education.
- Parents have peace of mind knowing that their children are safe, supervised and involved in enriched activities throughout the day and into the early evening.

How Do Community Schools Help Parents?

- You can take courses: English, high school equivalency classes, cooking, aerobics, adult literacy, computer classes, courses that build entrepreneurial skills – each school's offerings are based on community needs. Parents can define their own programs.
- You don't have to take extra time off from work – and children don't have to miss school – for routine medical appointments because medical and dental clinics are in the school.
- You spend less time transporting children from one activity to the next because almost everything they need is in the school.

How Can Schools Afford to Do All These Things?

Schools can't provide all of these services by themselves, but they can provide them with community agencies as partners. For schools and community agencies, this can be a cost-effective way to serve families and children. Instead of spending money to construct or maintain separate buildings, funds can go directly into programs. In addition, partnering with community agencies like the Boys & Girls Clubs brings the possibility of using their facilities and buildings to extend the services of the community school and better serve children and families.

By locating all child and family services within a single facility, both schools and social service agencies have opportunities to save:

- Teachers are able to dedicate more time to education and less time to non-academic issues.
- Money that the school does spend is used more effectively because student attendance rates are up and the children are better prepared to learn.
- The school building no longer sits empty afternoons, evenings, weekends and summers. The school's educational resources – its libraries, computers and gymnasium – are available to the community during the extended hours the building is open.
- Many communities may be able to implement a community school program by combining current government and private funding for a more efficient and effective approach.

How Do Community Schools Start?

Right now there are scores of community schools in the U.S. that offer excellent examples of this approach.

Most of these schools started as a result of partnerships among school officials, community agencies, parents and other local leaders. Usually, this community schools team will research what services are currently being offered in scattered sites throughout the town or city, then consider which of these might be willing to work within the school. Some started gradually, with a small after-school program added one year, a school-based clinic added the next and a Family Resource Room the next.

But for most of these programs, the first step was to make a commitment to improve opportunities for young people and a promise to work together for as long as it takes to make that positive change happen.

Ten Things You Can Do:

YOU have the power to start the process to create a new community school. You won't be able to do it alone – and it won't happen overnight – but by learning more and sharing what you learn with PTA members, friends and neighbors, school officials, local elected officials and busine s leaders, you can set the wheels in motion.

1. Speak with the principal of your child's school, the district superintendent and especially local school board members to express interest in the idea of community schools and to find out if there are plans to extend the hours and services of the school.
2. Ask other parents if they are interested in having your school become a community school. It's best to start with parents you know, and then ask them to speak with other parents they know.
3. Meet with the head of your local PTA to learn of any plans to begin changing your school into a community school. Offer to help the PTA leadership by enlisting other parents in the work.
4. Call more parents in the school – with the help of the PTA if possible – to assess needs and determine interest in changing your school into a community school.
5. Call your local United Way and/or other human resources coordinating body to learn about available child and family services in your area. This will help you document both local needs and possible resources to address these needs.
6. Ask your local Boys & Girls Club or other youth-serving agency if it would be interested in being a partner in your school.
7. Write a letter to all the parents in your child's school, explaining the results of your research.
8. Revisit the school's principal to describe the growing interest in community schools and to explore the possibility of raising these issues with your district superintendent.
9. Organize a group of interested parents and community leaders to visit a community school in a nearby area.
10. Explore local, state and national sources of funds that may be available to support the extended services of community schools. Meet with your mayor and/or other local government officials to inform them of your work and explore resources that may be available. Investigate possibilities, such as your local United Way and the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. See our Resources section for access to information about the latter on the web.

Keep your eye on the prize – a better education for your child and for other children in your community. Being an engaged and effective parent takes persistence and hard work. As other parents have learned, the process of transforming a regular school into a community school is a gradual one but it's do-able and worth doing.

Want to Learn More?

Community School Resources

Community Schools Partners

Throughout the country, there are many local and national organizations working to create and sustain community schools.

The After-School Corporation
925 Ninth Avenue
New York, NY 10019
212-547-6955
www.tascorp.org
Resources for parents to learn about after-school programs, how to bring after-school programs to a school, and how to get involved in advocacy efforts to increase funding for programs.

Alliance for Children & Families
c/o Linda Wheeler
11700 West Lake Park Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53224
414-359-1040
lwheeler@alliance1.org
www.alliance1.org
The Alliance web site provides information about the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program. Parents can call the national office to receive publications and discover contacts.

Coalition for Community Schools
c/o Institute for Educational Leadership
1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20036
202-822-8405, ext. 45
www.communityschools.org
Brings together local, state and national organizations that represent individuals and groups engaged in creating and sustaining community schools, including parents. Web site links to local and national community school networks, as well as to Coalition partners.

National Center for Community Education
1017 Avon Street
Flint, MI 48503
800-811-1105
www.nccenet.org
Its web site provides links to other sites on parents' involvement in learning.

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A
Fairfax, VA 22030-2401
703-359-8973
www.ncpie.org
Email for Sue Ferguson: ferguson@ncea.com
Dedicated to developing effective family-school partnerships in schools throughout the U.S..

National Community Education Association
3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A
Fairfax, VA 22030-2401
703-359-8973
www.ncea.com
Excellent web site for publications, resources, meeting calendars and more about community education.

National Network of Partnership Schools
Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships
3003 N. Charles Street, Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21218
410-516-8818
www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000
Organization brings together schools, districts and states that are committed to developing and maintaining comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnerships.

National Resource Center for Safe Schools
101 SW Main, Ste. 500
Portland, OR 97204
1-800-268-2275
www.safetyzone.org
Information for parents about schools, related issues. Web site is linked to many

other education-oriented web sites.

Public Education Network
601 13th Street, NW, #900 North
Washington, DC 20005
202-628-7460
www.publiceducation.org
PEN offers a number of useful publications on request from parents or community groups. The web site provides links to Local Education Funds (LEFs) in nearly every state.

The Children's Aid Society
Community Schools Technical Assistance Center
4600 Broadway at 196th Street
New York, NY 10040
212-569-2880
www.childrensaidsociety.org

U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202
800-USA-LEARN
www.ed.gov
Information about 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and references and links to many other topics and publications about schools and education. See Publications below.

Publications

Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers: Extending Learning in a Safe, Drug-Free Environment Before and After School
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/LearnCenters/

Safe and Smart: Making the After-School Hours Work for Kids
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/SafeandSmart/index.html

Safe Passages by Joy Dryfoos. Oxford University Press, 1998.

The Children's Aid Society

The Children's Aid Society was founded in 1853. It is one of the nation's oldest and largest non-sectarian charities, serving over 120,000 of New York's neediest children and their families with a network of services that include community schools, neighborhood centers, camps, adoption and foster care services, teen pregnancy prevention, education, health and recreation.

The Children's Aid Society's Community Schools

The Children's Aid Society operates eight community schools in New York City, serving more than 10,000 students and their families. Working in partnership with the New York City Board of Education, the local school districts and community organizations, the schools combine teaching and learning with a wide array of services, including on-site medical, dental and mental health care, enriched before- and after-school programs, early childhood and Head Start programs, adult education, job training, immigration services, parenting programs, health insurance enrollment and emergency assistance. Attendance in our schools (by children and teachers) is the best in their district, parent involvement has increased and academic achievement has improved. Our schools have created a sense of excitement and renewed hope in their Manhattan and Bronx communities, among the poorest in New York City.

Coalition for Community Schools

The Coalition for Community Schools brings together local, state and national organizations that are engaged in creating and sustaining community schools. Our goal is to work toward improving education and helping students learn and grow while supporting and strengthening their families and communities. Community schools integrate the efforts of many partners, offering a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities — before, during and after school, seven days a week. The Coalition promotes the development of community schools by disseminating information, connecting people and resources, and educating the general public.

From: The Children's Aid Society
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